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Billy Told Of Meeting Arms Dealer

He Later Denied Contact Took Place

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Billy Carter told Justice Department investigators that he knew international arms dealer Francis E. Terpil, currently under indictment here and in New York, and had been asked by Terpil to help export machine guns, The Washington Star has learned.

Although Billy Carter also said in January that he had been contacted in Americus, Ga., by Terpil about the machine gun deal, the president's brother two months later denied any knowledge of Terpil, several congressmen and other sources familiar with Justice Department records told The Washington Star.

On March 20, during a telephone conversation with Joel S. Lisker, chief of the Justice Department's foreign agent registration unit, Billy Carter denied having any knowledge of Terpil. But during a Jan. 16 interview he had identified the arms dealer as the man sitting at his right in a picture taken of the parade review stand at the 10th anniversary celebration of the Libyan revolution in Benghazi, Libya.

During an interview with The Washington Star Monday, Terpil acknowledged that he was at the Libyan 10th anniversary and said, "no comment," when asked if he had met Billy Carter.

The late editions of Tuesday's Washington Star carried new pictures of Terpil and the Sept. 1, 1979, picture taken by Michael and Aubine Kirtley of Billy Carter in the parade review stand. Michael Kirt-

ley said yesterday that he had initially incorrectly identified the photo, which appears in this week's issue of Time, as having been taken in Tripoli, rather than Benghazi.

Terpil Monday denied he was the man in that Kirtley photo, the same one that had run in the November 1979 issue of Life and was used by Justice Department investigators when they asked Billy Carter on Jan. 16 about Terpil.

In late January, Billy Carter told a national tabloid that while in the reviewing stand he "must have shifted seats a dozen times that day."

After the pictures of Terpil ran in The Washington Star, sources from the Middle East said they believed the man sitting next to Billy Carter was more likely to be Amhed Jibril, who is secretary general of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command, the so-called "rejectionist front" of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Neither Terpil nor Billy Carter was available for comment yesterday.

Terpil faces trial here on federal charges related to allegations that he conspired at Libya's request in 1976 to assassinate a former Libyan politician exiled in Egypt. He also is scheduled to be tried in New York for trying to sell 10,000 machine guns and ammunition to undercover agents.

The Justice Department's foreign agents registration unit informed the U.S. attorney's office here, during its investigation of Terpil, of the statements about the arms merchant from Billy Carter and his Georgia friends.

Several Justice Department sources have indicated that they tend to discount any suggestions of strong ties or friendship between Billy Carter and Terpil, especially because the proposed machine gun deal never went through.

A Justice Department source said, "In a later interview, Billy said that we had misunderstood what he had said, and Joel Lisker believes that it is quite possible that we misunderstood." The source did not elaborate.

House Judiciary Committee member Harold Sawyer, R-Mich., said that the Justice Department files show that Billy Carter said in January that Terpil had approached him, and perhaps several of his friends from Georgia who had accompanied him to Libya, and "asked them if Billy could get a fairly significant quantity of machine guns for them."

"The FBI report," Sawyer said, indicated that Terpil asked Billy Carter "Could they get a large number of machine guns, a lot of machine guns?"

Acknowledging that he wasn't certain about all the details, Sawyer added that the FBI write-up of January interviews with Billy Carter and several of his associates said that Terpil "had made this request to Billy and Billy had said he'd see what he could do for him, or something like that." Subsequently, Billy totally denied that.

Rep. Harold L. Volkmer, D-Mo., also a House Judiciary Committee member, suggested that Terpil made contact with one of Billy Carter's friends, such as Henry Randolph Coleman, rather than directly with the president's brother.

Another source said that in January, "Billy says he met Frank Terpil in Libya and evidently sat beside him in a parade over there. He then goes on and makes the statement that Terpil got a hold of him down in Americus, Ga., and proposed to him a deal on a sale of machine guns to Libya, but that nothing ever came of it." Then on March 20, Billy tells Lisker that he didn't even make that statement back in January. He all of a sudden has become very sensitive on Terpil."